

Paul before Felix.

No. 13. Acts 24th—25th.

As he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this Time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

The Chapter from which these words are taken, forces itself on our notice, as one of the most entertaining, instructive, and awful of all which relate the propagation of Christianity.

St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, was sent down from Jerusalem to Cesarea, under a strong Guard of Horsemen and Foot, to be tried before Felix, the Roman Deputy Governor of the Province, for a transgression of the Law, of which he was accused, and a tumult of Sedition his Opinions had occasioned among the two discordant sects of the Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

To silence, at least, the Apostle in future, and, by his Example, to deter others of his Persuasion from preaching this new doctrine & bringing certain strange

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"things to their ears,"—to give solemnity to the trial, & efficacy to their proceedings, Ananias, the high-priest, with the elders of the Sanhedrim, came down also to Cesarea, having retained a certain Orator, named Tertullus, to manage their Indictment, and be their Advocate or Counsel. And he seems not ill-qualified for the Part he had undertaken—his speech is short and conciliating, but full of bitter invective and religious persecution: his charge he supports by the evidence of the Sanhedrim—for the sacred Writer tells us "the Jews gave their Assent to the Truth" of his Assertions, "saying that these things were so." St. Paul, having the liberty of speaking in his own justification, gives distinct answers to the several parts of the charge made against him, in the prosecution of which, he exhibits a specimen of his abilities, and a testimony of his innocence, so striking, as to excite astonishment and curiosity, and so powerful, as to awaken compassion and regard.

Felix, having heard his admirable defence, refused to make a final determination before he had seen Claudius Lysias, the Chief Captain, who would relate with accu-

racy, and ascertain with precision, the alledged sedition & tumult—and commanded Paul to be kept, in the intervening time, under a guard.—“And after certain days, “when Felix came with his wife Drusilla,” who was born and educated in the Jewish Faith, “to Cesarea, the “Governor sent for Paul to appear before them”—that he might hear what the Apostle could say concerning his religion—“concerning that way which the Jews called heresy”—how he could support it by Arguments—illustrate it with Observations, and adorn it with Eloquence. The Apostle selects for the subject of his discourse two virtues, on the observance of which depend the comforts and happiness of civil & domestic life, shewing the obligations Christianity lies on its professors inviolably to practise them—and enforces them by the most awful of all considerations—an impartial account all men must give of their actions at God’s tribunal, and be eternally punished or rewarded. But the Governor, in a fit of trembling, interrupts his Prisoner, saying he would hear him further at a more convenient season. And as he, &c.

We will first consider the conduct and manners

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of the man whom the Apostle addresses in his discourse of Righteousness, Temperance, & Judgment to come, where we shall see the strength of understanding, fervor of zeal, and boldness of reproof, by which he was so eminently distinguished in the delivery of a discourse which made Felix tremble.

The Character of Felix, as given by Historians of unquestionable veracity, is, that during his Government of Judea, under the Roman Emperor Claudius Cesar, he exercised every species of cruelty, and committed every kind of injustice—his Power was displayed in acts of violence, and in the exercise of tyranny. A Governor, of such a complexion, sheltered under the wings of Impunity, must have been exceedingly odious to those who groaned beneath the weight of his Vengeance:—but he became more detestable by the indulgence of his Lusts, in the gratification of which, he broke down all the fences of Continence, Honor, and Affection. The marrying Drusilla is a notorious Instance. She was the wife of another man—but Felix, having heard her celebrated for the charms of her Beauty, seduced her from her

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Husband, and, in contempt of Right, and defiance of Law, kept her for his own wife, and so lived with her in a continued State of Adultery.

To his catalogue of vices we are to add, further, Bribery & Oppression, intimated by the sacred Historian—"he sent for Paul the oftener to talk with him, hoping that money would have been given him by Paul."—And this he did, no doubt, because St. Paul had said in his defence that "he came up to Jerusalem to bring alms to his nation." Disappointed in his avaricious hopes, he kept Paul a prisoner for two years; and when he was recalled by Nero the succeeding Emperor, on a charge of Cruelty and Oppression, he, meanly and maliciously, "left Paul bound" to induce the Jews to represent him to the Emperor with less Asperity of Censure, and less Vehemence of Indignation.—

Such is the character of Felix! Let us now see how wisely adapted, and suitably applied, was the subject of St. Paul's discourse—"he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come."—

The design of the Apostle was to shew the strong

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obligations the doctrines of Christianity lie on men to observe the rules of justice and righteousness—and, if on men, individually—how great on those in whom the administration of justice is vested? for it is not necessary they should be irreproachable only in such administration—but exemplary in their conduct:—they are “to shine as lights in the World,” and to enforce the Laws, as well by their moral Practice, as by their delegated Power. And, that the Governor might not elude the strength of his Arguments, by any Evasions of Sophistry or Artifices of Deceit, he urges the severe and impartial account to be given in a Judgment to come—where Power can no longer oppress, Authority protect, nor Cunning conceal—a Tribunal where Poverty and Wealth will be on the same level, and submissive Weakness have equal advantages with vindictive Rage—a Tribunal, where real Goodness will be rewarded with everlasting Glory, and actual Guilt be banished for ever from the presence of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

To preach to a Magistrate, invested with uncontrollable Power, that a future Punishment awaited him from

a supreme Judicature, indicated an intrepid spirit hardly attentive to its own preservation. St. Paul was a prisoner—he was to appear at the Bar of the Magistrate, and stand as a criminal to be tried for his life. Instead of moving the pity & conciliating the esteem of the Judge by exercising his Talents in an ostentatious display of “the many worthy deeds done to the Province by the wisdom” of the Governor’s Administration, the Apostle calls upon him to forsake his deeds of Rapine, and subdue his habits of Lust; and, in the presence, too, of the very person who had so powerful an ascendancy over him—either not considering, or contemning the fate of John the Baptist, whose head was demanded of Herod by the suggestion of Herodias, whom, like Felix, he had unlawfully married. He exemplified, in his conduct, his own Declaration, “I count all things but Loss for the excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:” whether the Governor would admire his discourse or not—or, whether it might not exasperate and provoke his Judge to deprive him of his liberty or his life, was not the object of his consideration or regard:—but, from a Knowledge of the

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Character of the person before whom he was speaking, he selected topics, which might be the means, by the Blessing of God, of awakening him from his lethargy of vice, and implanting in his mind, seeds of virtue and principles of piety.—But such appeals are, generally, uneasy to a guilty mind—the potion which was administered, tho' salutary in its effects, was nauseous to the Palate.—So powerful was the reasoning, and so irresistible the application, he cries out, "Go thy way for this time, when
" I have a convenient season I will call for thee." And we often find that men, however flagrant may be their weaknesses, ridiculous their opinions, or reproachful their conduct—the reproof be given with the gentlest Intimation—discover the same uneasiness with Felix: from the same consciousness they are seized with trembling, and tacitly acknowledge the justice and propriety of the Reproof—but, "go thy way," they cry, "for this time"—when I am disposed to hear of my weaknesses, my follies, or my vices, which too often meet me with unwelcome interruption, "I will call for thee."

That the Governor of Judea, when the enormity of

his sins was set clearly before his eyes, should tremble, with apprehension, at the sight of his danger—should behold, with horror, the precipice on which he stood, & the Gulph below ready to receive him, does not create astonishment nor excite surprize.—“ Fearfulness and trembling came upon him, and an horrible dread overwhelmed him:—“ for wickedness, condemned by its own witness, is very timorous, and always forcasteth grievous things.” St. Paul had represented his guilt in such glaring colours; the simplicity of Truth was enforced by cogency of Argument & persuasion of Oratory so strong as to impress conviction, & so powerful as to alarm with Terror:—his Vices presented themselves in dreadful array to his conscience, the Tyranny of Oppression, the subversion of public happiness, & the annihilation of domestic peace.—Unable to look on such a scene with Tranquility, or anticipate its effects without Consternation, he trembles at the account he must one day give.

I now proceed to the last part of the Text, that when Felix trembled at the reasoning of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, instead of exami-

ning his ways, forsaking his sins, and embracing Christianity, he dismisses the Apostle with—"Go thy way for
 " this time, when I have a convenient season I will call
 " for thee."

When a Judgment to come was founded in his ears, the sad state of his accounts how utterly unfit, how altogether unprepared they were to undergo an accurate Inspection, filled his Soul with anxious disquietude.—But, notwithstanding, he had not resolution "to break the chain of his
 " sins with which he was so fast tied and bound." He might indeed purpose to become a Christian—amend his life, and provide against a future Judgment: but this, unhappily, was to be deferred till some other, and, as he termed it, "more convenient Season." To have prepared against a Judgment to come, was, to have instantly forsaken all those vices by which he was so infamously distinguished—to "have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty—to have made restitution for the injuries and
 " wrongs he had committed"—to have subjected his licentious desires to the Reins of Continence; and, from having in his Bosom a "heart of stone, to have had a heart of

"flesh:"—in other words, instead of "loving the world
 "and being a Lover of Pleasure—to have set his Affec-
 "tions on things above, and have become a Lover of God."
 To a man of Felix's disposition, this was a strange re-
 verse! And rather than a real Conversion should be
 wrought in him, he puts off both the discourse and his
 amendment to some other more convenient season.

I will presume a little longer on your pa-
 tience whilst I make an application from what has been
 said.

The Gospel is ordained by God to be preached to
 make us better men. Does it produce this desirable ef-
 fect, and, the more we hear it, do we improve in the prac-
 tice of all virtue?—Or, does he that was unjust contin-
 nue to be unjust still? Preaching is an ordinance of God,
 and is instituted for the express purpose "of converting
 "Sinners from the error of their ways."—The most ab-
 ject wretch, who has not where to lay his head, and the
 most despotic monarch, that ever swayed a Sceptre, are,
 hereby, equally put in mind of the duties of their respec-
 tive stations, and of the account all men must one day

give to God. The word preached assures us we are to be tried, all, before a Tribunal where our every action, and the motives of it, will be known. The man, who has imbrued his hands in injustice, whether under the cover of established custom, and the sanction of popular fashion—whether his acts of deceit have been secretly committed, or his lust of rapine openly perpetrated, will then wish his dealings had been always undisguised as the light, & clear as the noon-day.—To men who are conscious their transactions are not honest—whose hearts tell them they take advantage of the acknowledged ignorance, and unsuspecting innocence of their neighbor—to such men let me appeal, in the presence of that God, “to whose eye all things are naked and open,”—and ask them whether they do not, like Felix, tremble at the thoughts of a future Judgment? Or, you congratulate yourselves, it may be, on the felicity of address, and dexterity of cunning, by which you can over-reach—on the exercise of authority & command of influence—by which you can over-power the helpless.—Enjoy your Triumph—but you will not enjoy it long.—The scene will be soon closed—soon will it be

said—"how hath the oppressor ceased! Leave off then from
 "deceit and let go Oppression—and go, prepare to meet
 "thy God."—The same Argument applies to the com-
 mission of every sin—whether the indulgence of irregular
 desires, the custom of intemperate swearing, the profanation
 of the holy Sabbath—"for all these things God will, one
 "day, bring us into Judgment."—Whenever then we
 hear, by the preaching of the word, God speaking to us
 as he spoke by the Prophet to David, saying, "thou art the
 "man"—let us instantly consider our danger—let us
 consider we are obnoxious to the wrath of God—that "our
 "sins have separated Him from us—and that there is
 "but a Step between us and eternal Death."—From this
 moment, let us amend our life—let us not, like Felix,
 "put it off till a more convenient season," persuading our-
 selves that we will repent at some future period—No—if
 whilst we are under the power of conviction, and the ap-
 prehension of danger, we do not "begin to learn the way of
 "righteousness"—it is to be feared we shall never know it
 —if we put off our repentance when our sins flash con-
 fusion in our face, there is but too much reason to appre-

hence that, as we have lived, so shall we die—we have lived wicked, we shall die impenitent.—

It is a melancholy consideration that many men attend the preaching of the Gospel all their life long, without being at all the better for it:—they hear the denunciations of God Almighty against the sins they are continually committing, without thinking it worth their while to consider that they are the very persons on whom those awful threatnings will be executed. The minister of the Gospel “stands between the living and the dead”—“sent”—by God himself to warn men of the danger to which they are liable by the commission of sin, and they hear him, with as much unconcern, as if they were certain, beyond all possibility of doubt, of their salvation. How can they reconcile such insolent, such rebellious conduct towards their Maker? Are they content to run the risque of incurring his displeasure? Or, do they think He threatens with a design never to inflict his Punishments? Such a thought leads, I fear, to eternal condemnation. To prevent any mistake where our immortal happiness is concerned, let us be persuaded immediately to examine the

state of our souls—whether, according to the terms of the
 Gospel, “ we have hope towards God ? ” let us bring faithfully
 to our remembrance our past sins, and let the Gospel fairly determine whether we are the objects of God’s
 mercy or of his displeasure. If there be the least doubt—
 if the Gospel does not pronounce, unequivocally, in our
 favour—if it does not remove every apprehension—let us
 not say to our Conscience what Felix said to the Apostle,
 “ Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient
 “ season I will call for thee ”—but, let us this day, “ before
 “ our eyes sleep, or our eye-lids slumber, or the temples
 “ of our head take any rest,” let us devote ourselves to God—
 let our thoughts be exalted—our affections raised to Heaven—
 our minds renewed—and let us walk, not as others,
 but as the Children of God. Then, when the awful day arrives—
 the day, when every son and daughter of Adam, from the
 existence of creation to the dissolution of all things—
 shall enter upon their unalterable state of complete
 Happiness or indescribable Misery, we shall be welcomed,
 through the Merits and Satisfaction of Jesus Christ our
 Lord, with this transporting Invitation—“ Come, ye

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"Blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared
"for you from the foundation of the world."

Theoph^o. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers Hall.

